Article

How domestic abuse data are captured through the criminal justice system: November 2026

Information on the stages of the criminal justice process in England and Wales, and how data are captured at each stage.

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Table of contents

1. Introduction

2. Stages of the criminal justice system

3. An incident of domestic abuse occurs

4. The incident is reported to the police

5. A domestic abuse-related crime is recorded

6. Pursuing a prosecution and the Crown Prosecution Service

7. Outcomes

8. Comparing data sources across the criminal justice system

9. Glossary

10. More about domestic abuse

11. Related links

12. Cite this article

1 . Introduction

This publication is part of our domestic abuse statistics release. It brings together data from a range of different organisations to create a more coherent picture of how victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse interact with the criminal justice system and support services.

It is produced, working in collaboration with, and using data sources from:

- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
- His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service
- His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)
- Home Office
- Ministry of Justice

Up-to-date statistics, and other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales, can be found in the most recent Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview.

Throughout the release we present both official statistics and accredited official statistics. Accredited official statistics are a subset of official statistics that have been certified by the UK Statistics Authority as compliant with its Code of Practice for Statistics.

Data from the following sources are classified as accredited official statistics:

- Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) with the exception of year ending (YE) March 2022; more information can be found in our Domestic abuse quality and methodology information (QMI) and our User guide to crime statistics for England and Wales
- Home Office Homicide Index
- Ministry of Justice criminal justice and family court statistics

Data from the following sources are classified as official statistics:

- police recorded crime
- crime outcomes data

Other data included are from administrative datasets that do not fall within the scope of official statistics.

This publication presents the stages of the criminal justice process in England and Wales for cases of domestic abuse. It describes how the data are captured at each stage of the process and provides important information about each data source. It should be viewed alongside the other publications and data in this release to aid understanding.

2 . Stages of the criminal justice system

Figure 1 provides an overview of how cases of domestic abuse are captured and flow through the criminal justice system. The following sections of this publication provide detailed information on each stage of the process and the data sources available. Data from the criminal justice system are presented in our Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system datatables. Our Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system, England and Wales article has been suspended and the content has been moved into our Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview. For detailed definitions of terms referred to throughout this publication seeSection 9: Glossary.

Figure 1: How data are captured and interlinked across the criminal justice system in England and Wales

Source: Office for National Statistics

3 . An incident of domestic abuse occurs

Following a single or repeated occurrence of domestic abuse, a victim may choose to tell someone or seek support. Alternatively, a third party (relative, friend, professional) may report on the victim's behalf either with or without their knowledge.

Victim remains hidden

In cases where a victim chooses not to report the matter to the police or to other domestic abuse services, the victim remains hidden from the police and the criminal justice system. Such victims may be included in the statistics produced from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW).

For cases where a victim does not report abuse to the police or to other domestic abuse services, theymay be included in the statistics produced from the CSEW. The CSEW is a victimisation survey which asks people about their experiences of a range of crimes irrespective of whether they reported them to the police. A description of, and methodological information about, the face-to-face CSEW are available within theUser guide to crime statisticsand theDomestic abuse quality and methodology information (QMI)report.

Prevalence estimates for domestic abuse are produced from the self-completion module on domestic abuse, sexual victimisation and stalking from the CSEW. The CSEW presents two headline measures of domestic abuse: one relates to experiences since the age of 16 years and the other is limited to those experiences in the 12 months prior to interview.

The CSEW covers the population living in households in England and Wales; it does not cover the population living in group residences (for example, care homes or student halls of residence) or other institutions.

For the self-completion module, respondents are handed a tablet computer to use to answer questions. This allows respondents to feel more at ease when answering these sensitive questions because of increased confidence in the privacy and confidentiality of the survey.

The age range for respondents eligible for the self-completion module was expanded in April 2017, changing from adults aged 16 to 59 years to adults aged 16 to 74 years living in households in England and Wales.

The face-to-face Crime Survey for England and Wales was suspended on 17 March 2020 because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. TheTelephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW) replaced the CSEW andwas specifically designed to allow us to continue measuring crime during this period. However, concerns around confidentiality and respondent safeguarding limited the types of questions asked in the TCSEW, specifically those relating to domestic abuse. As a result, CSEW and TCSEW data and estimates are not available in theDomestic abuse in England and Wales: November 2021 publication. Further information about the TCSEW can be found in section 2.1 of theUser guide to crime in England and Wales: measuring crime during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Data collection for the face-to-face CSEW resumed on 4 October 2021 with the upper age limit for the self-completion modules on domestic abuse, sexual assault and stalking removed. Data based on six months of CSEW interviews were used in our year ending (YE) March 2022 bulletin. Data based on eight months of CSEW interviews were used in our YE March 2023 bulletinbecause of an error which resulted in missing data for some respondents from October 2022 to October 2023 inclusive.

Data based on a split sample were used in our YE March 2024 and YE March 2025 bulletins, because of new domestic abuse questions (PDF, 471KB) (opens in a new tab) being tested on the survey from April 2023. Caution should be taken when using these data, because of the impact of the reduced base sizes on the quality of the data. Further details are available in our Domestic abuse quality and methodology information (QMI).

Through our evaluation of the split-sample trial, we concluded that the new questions provided a better measure of domestic abuse. Therefore, we decided to change to using the new survey questions in the CSEW to measure domestic abuse from April 2025.More information on the inclusion of the new domestic abuse questions on the CSEW permanently can be found in our Evaluating a new measure of domestic abuse article and our Redevelopment of domestic abuse statistics articles.

Support is provided to victims from a range of services

Some victims seek help from support services or are referred to services by another agency, for example, health services. This can occur whether the case comes to the attention of the police or not.

In cases which do come to the attention of the police, the victim may be referred to support services by the police. Alternatively, the victim may have reported the incident to the police following an interaction with support services.

As part of our Domestic abuse in England and Wales publications, we present a selection of data on the provision of domestic abuse victim services in England and Wales. These data are collected and held by a range of charities, and cover topics such as the availability of services and characteristics of service users.

Data on victim services provision in England and Wales were not updated in our YE March 2024 publication while we focused on redeveloping the domestic abuse questions on the CSEW. Data on victim services provision was reintroduced in our YE March 2025 bulletin but have since been suspended from YE March 2026 while we focus resource on analysis of our CSEW domestic abuse data.

Services data included were provided by:

- Karma Nirvana
- ManKind Initiative
- Refuge
- Respect
- SafeLives
- Welsh Women's Aid
- Women's Aid Federation of England

These data were sourced from non-governmental, administrative datasets and are not classified as official statistics. Data on domestic abuse services reflect support offered to victims that become visible to these services.

4 . The incident is reported to the police

The first recording stage in the criminal justice process begins when the police receive a report of an incident of domestic abuse. An incident can be reported to the police by victims, members of the public, or can be referred by a police officer or a "third party", including professionals such as NHS staff and social workers.

Domestic abuse-related incidents cover reports of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults, aged 16 years and over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members (regardless of gender or sexuality). The police, at this stage, will either:

- record a domestic abuse-related incident pending further investigation
- record the incident as a domestic abuse-related crime if it is clear that such an offence has taken place

The Home Office provides data on the number of domestic abuse-related incidents. To get a better picture of the demand upon the police that relates to domestic abuse, it is necessary to consider both domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes.

The report is recorded by the police as an incident

When the police record a report of domestic abuse as an incident, they must then assess whether or not an offence has been committed in accordance with the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) [note 1].

For cases that are recorded first as an incident, there are two possible outcomes. If it is concluded that a crime did not take place, the domestic abuse incident remains recorded as an incident. Alternatively, a domestic abuse-related crime may be recorded in addition to the incident. However, the incident data that police forces submit to the Home Office exclude incidents subsequently recorded as crimes.

Not all reported crimes are recorded as an incident first. If it is clear when the incident is reported that an offence has occurred, the police may record the matter as a domestic abuse-related crime immediately without first recording an incident.

The report is recorded as a domestic abuse-related crime

If it is concluded that an offence has been committed, either immediately when reported, or after being recorded as an incident, the matter will be recorded as a crime and will be identified as domestic abuse-related.

Notes for: The incident is reported to the police

1. An example of a domestic abuse incident that does not amount to a crime would be two family members having a loud argument, a third party calls the police, the police attend and calm the situation down, but no crime has taken place.

5 . A domestic abuse-related crime is recorded

The Home Office is responsible for the collation of recorded crime data supplied by the 43 territorial police forces of England and Wales, plus the British Transport Police [note 1].

Offences that are domestic abuse-related will be recorded under the respective offence that has been committed, for example, assault with injury. This is because (with the exception of controlling or coercive behaviour) domestic abuse is not a specific criminal offence.

The Home Office has been collecting information from the police on whether recorded offences are related to domestic abuse since April 2015 [note 2], but it is not possible to determine how many crimes were domestic abuse-related prior to this date. Information collected relies on the police flagging offences as domestic abuse-related and it is possible that some offences may not be correctly identified.

Since April 2023, police forces have been able to use a new methodology, the National Data Quality Improvement Service (NDQIS), to help identify whether an offence was domestic abuse-related or not. The NDQIS tool automatically flags offences involving domestic abuse-related offences rather than solely relying on a manually-added marker. Prior to this date, the collection relied on the police correctly adding the domestic abuse-related marker to a crime, and it is possible that for some offences the marker was not correctly added. At the time of publishing, 37 forces have used NDQIS and further forces will be moving to the new methodology in future releases.

The new methodology will lead to an increase in offences identified as being domestic abuse-related. Analysis of data from eight forces (Avon and Somerset, Bedfordshire, Durham, Hertfordshire, Kent, Norfolk, South Wales and Suffolk) showed that the number of additional offences that were identified as being domestic abuse-related for the YE March 2024 was 3%. Caution should be applied when comparing data for the latest year as they are not directly comparable to previous years. For more information on NDQIS methodology, please see our Police recorded offences involving knives or sharp instruments: methodology changes.

Statutory guidance published on GOV.UK's guidance framework states that domestic abuse-related crimes include "controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship" [note 3]. Controlling or coercive behaviour was introduced as a specific criminal offence as part of the Serious Crime Act 2015 and came into force on 29 December 2015.

Where data on domestic abuse-related crimes have been analysed by age and sex of the victim, data from the Home Office Data Hub [note 4] are used.

In addition to domestic abuse-related crimes, the Home Office also provides data on domestic homicides. These data are extracted from the Homicide Index which contains detailed record-level information about each homicide recorded by the police in England and Wales. It is continually updated with revised information from the police and the courts and, as such, is a richer source of data than the main recorded crime dataset [note 5].

Homicides are recorded to be "domestic" when the relationship between a victim aged 16 years and over, and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories:

- spouse
- cohabiting partner
- boyfriend or girlfriend
- ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend
- adulterous relationship
- lover's spouse
- son or daughter or parent (including step and adopted relationships)
- brother or sister
- other relatives

These data exclude homicides where the victim was aged under 16 years, to be consistent with the government definition of domestic abuse used elsewhere in the release.

Homicide Index data are based on the year when the offence was recorded, not when the offence took place or when the case was heard in court. While in the majority of cases the offence will be recorded in the same year as it took place, this is not always the case. The data refer to the position as at a specific point in time, when the Homicide Index database is "frozen" for the purpose of analysis [note 6]. This will be stated alongside the findings throughout the release. The data may change as subsequent court hearings take place or as other information is received.

Analysis on data from the Homicide Index combines data for a three-year period to account for the year-to-year variability in the volume of homicides. Data on the number of domestic homicides by sex can be broken down by police force area but there is considerable volatility in these numbers over time because of the relatively low volumes involved. See ourDomestic abuse prevalence and victim characteristics datasetaccompanying the release for more information.

The Home Office also provides police recorded crime data on stalking and harassment offences identified as domestic abuse-related. Stalking and harassment offences include harassment, controlling or coercive behaviour, malicious communications, racially or religiously aggravated harassment, and stalking.

Once a domestic abuse-related crime is recorded, the police then conduct an investigation which aims to collect all evidence relevant to the case, and identify a suspect. Following investigation, the police will assign an outcome to the offence:

- Suspect charged following referral of case to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS): in these cases, the police charge a suspect with an offence relating to domestic abuse following a decision by the CPS.

- Case transferred: when, after further investigation, it becomes apparent that the offence took place in another police force area, this would lead to a crime being transferred to that police force for the investigation to be continued [note 7].

- No suspect is identified so case cannot proceed: although very rare for domestic abuse cases, sometimes the investigation does not identify a suspect (as the victim may be unwilling to give details); as such, the case does not proceed.

- Suspect receives an out of court disposal, for example a caution: in some exceptional cases, the police may issue the suspect with a caution.

- Crime report is cancelled: where, after further investigation, the police decide that a crime has not taken place and subsequently, the crime report is cancelled.

- Decision that no further action will be taken: in some cases the police may decide that there is not enough evidence to take the case forward and take no further action; another example of when the police may be unable to pursue an investigation is where the offender has died before the case could be investigated or prosecuted.

Arrests, bails and voluntary attendances

Once the police have recorded a crime, they may arrest a suspect. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) collect data from police forces on arrests, bails and voluntary attendances for domestic abuse related crimes [note 8]. HMICFRS's progress report on the police response to domestic abuse (PDF, 1.5MB) (opens in a new tab) published in 2015 highlights concerns over the variation in arrest rates across police forces. You can also view HMICFRS's review of policing domestic abuse during the pandemic.

Outcomes of domestic abuse-related and non-domestic abuse-related crimes

Police recorded crime data on outcomes of domestic abuse-related and non-domestic abuse-related crimes are from the Home Office Data Hub. These data also provide information on the time taken to assign an outcome.

Notes for: A domestic abuse-related crime is recorded

1. For more information on how police forces submit their data to the Home Office, please refer to our User guide to crime statistics.

2. In response to a recommendation in His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC's) 2014 report Everyone's business: Improving the police response to domestic abuse, police forces are asked to "flag" crimes as being domestic abuse-related if the offence meets the government definition of domestic violence and abuse.

3. This offence is constituted by behaviour on the part of the perpetrator, which takes place "repeatedly or continuously". The victim and alleged perpetrator must be "personally connected" at the time the behaviour takes place. The behaviour must have had a "serious effect" on the victim, meaning that it has caused the victim to fear violence will be used against them on "at least two occasions", or it has had a "substantial adverse effect on the victims' day-to-day activities". The alleged perpetrator must have known that their behaviour would have a serious effect on the victim, or the behaviour must have been such that he or she "ought to have known" it would have that effect.

4. This is a record-level database that police forces use to supply police recorded crime data.

5. For example, when the police initially record an offence as a homicide it remains classified as such unless the police or courts decide that a lesser offence, or no offence, took place. The offence would be reclassified on the Homicide Index as "no longer recorded" but remain in the main police recorded crime collection as a homicide.

6. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from the police as investigations continue and as cases are heard by the courts. The version used for analysis does not accept updates after it is "frozen" to ensure the data do not change during the analysis period. See our User guide to crime statistics for more information.

7. There are strict guidelines to which the police must adhere to in order to transfer or cancel a crime report (please refer to the Home Office Counting Rules for further information).

8. Voluntary attendances act as an alternative to arrest where the suspect attends a police station voluntarily to assist with investigation. Not all forces are able to provide data on the number of arrests, bails and voluntary attendances for domestic abuse-related crimes.

6 . Pursuing a prosecution and the Crown Prosecution Service

During the investigation, some victims (for a wide variety of reasons) may decide not to, or be unable to, support the police in their enquiries. Although this often means that it is more difficult for any further action to be taken by the police, the case will continue to be progressed if possible.

Evidence-led prosecutions are an option considered by the police and may be taken up by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). This means that, even in cases where a victim is unwilling or unable to appear in court as a witness, it does not necessarily prevent the suspect being subject to a trial.

In cases where the victim does not, or is unable to, support a police investigation or prosecution, the offence remains recorded. In such cases, the police may suggest ways the victim can seek support through the criminal justice process, or from specialist support agencies or organisations. Where the victim still does not, or is unable to, support the investigation or prosecution, the police and the CPS will review all the evidence in the case to determine if the case can continue without the evidence of the victim. Where theCode for Crown Prosecutorsis satisfied, the crime will proceed to court. If there is insufficient evidence, or if it is not in the public interest to prosecute, the case cannot continue regardless of how serious it is.

To support a victim through the trial process, the CPS can ask the court to allow a victim or a witness in the case to use a variety of "special measures". These can include giving evidence behind screens or from another room or location using a video link as well as video recorded pre-trial cross examination (in some courts), clearing of the court and removal of wigs and gowns of judges and barristers. Where the case is reliant on the evidence of the victim, the CPS may ask the court to compel the witness to attend court by issuing a witness summons. However, this will only occur after the police have carried out a full risk assessment and detailed enquiries have been made with any specialist support agencies who are providing assistance to the victim.

The CPS must authorise decisions to charge in domestic abuse cases (other than those cases in forces taking part in the Domestic Abuse Charging Authority Project). The police can refer a case through to the CPS for a charging decision or in more complex cases for early advice. The joint NPCC-CPS Domestic Abuse Joint Justice plan encourages prosecutors to have early conversations with the police officers if they are unable to make charging decisions when cases are submitted, and it also encourages the police to contact the CPS from the outset where there are complex legal issues to be addressed.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)

The CPS is the principal prosecuting authority for England and Wales, acting independently in criminal cases investigated by the police and others. The CPS can only consider cases that are referred to them by the police or other investigators. Specifically, with regard to domestic abuse, the CPS:

- can advise the police during the early stages of investigations in more serious or complex cases
- decides which cases should be prosecuted after the cases have been referred to them by the police
- prepares cases and presents them at court using a range of in-house advocates, self-employed advocates or agents in court
- provides information, assistance and support to victims and prosecution witnesses including, where appropriate, by applying to the court for restraining orders to reduce the risk faced by victims of crime and their dependants

TheCode for Crown Prosecutorssets out the principles to be followed by Crown Prosecutors when they make case decisions. The CPS does not determine guilt; this is a matter for the court to decide on the facts of a case as presented. The CPS aims to build the strongest possible cases on the available evidence to assist the jury in this task.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had substantial impacts on the CPS and the entire criminal justice system. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in reduced court capacity, therefore a rise in live caseload per Prosecutor and a backlog of cases awaiting time in court. This consequently had an impact on the number of prosecutions being finalised and on the corresponding CPS data. Please seethe Crown Prosecution Service annual reports for 2020 to 2021 (PDF, 2.9KB) (opens in a new tab)andthe Crown Prosecution Service annual reports for 2021 to 2022 (PDF, 3.4KB) (opens in a new tab).

Police referrals to the CPS for a decision to charge a suspect are sometimes referred to as pre-charge receipts, and are the most frequent interaction between the police and the CPS. In some circumstances, a case referred to the CPS may require further evidence to be obtained before a charge decision can be made. If this is the case, the Prosecutor will advise the officer of the further material required to obtain a charging decision by way of a targeted and specific action plan.

Where the police believe that a domestic abuse case could proceed to charge, the decision to charge is made by the CPS and not the police.

In November 2024, the National Police Chiefs' Council and CPS published the Domestic Abuse Joint Justice Plan (DA JJP) to drive improvements in the investigation, prosecution and overall handling of domestic abuse cases, while allowing flexibility to reflect local needs and service provision. The plan sets out a shared commitment between police and prosecutors to build stronger cases from the outset, deliver more timely justice for victims and improve the identification of behaviour-driven offending – particularly targeting repeat and serial perpetrators. It also aims to ensure that victims are heard, supported and protected throughout their journey in the criminal justice process.

CPS data are available through its Case Management System (CMS) and associated Management Information System (MIS). The CPS collects data to assist in the effective management of its prosecution functions and therefore does not collect data that constitute official statistics as defined in theStatistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

CPS domestic abuse data are dependent upon lawyers and administrative staff correctly identifying applicable cases and flagging the case on the CMS. These data are accurate only to the extent that flags have been correctly applied.

For CPS data, a domestic abuse flag may be applied at the beginning of a case, or later in the prosecution process if a domestic abuse relationship becomes apparent. There is a time lag between every stage of the criminal justice process – from police referral to the CPS for charging, prosecution, conviction and sentencing. For example, a domestic abuse case could be referred to the CPS in one year, but a conviction may not be secured until a later year. As a result, the data presented in this release on referrals, prosecutions and convictions do not necessarily refer to the same cohort of cases and caution should be taken when making comparisons [note 1].

CPS data include both child and adult defendant and victim data. This does not strictly align with the government definition of domestic abuse, which only applies to those cases where both the victim and perpetrator are aged 16 years and over. CPS data also cover stalking or harassment offences flagged as domestic abuse-related, and controlling or coercive behaviour offences.

The data also include new offences introduced in the Online Safety Act 2023. Those offences are "Sharing or threatening to share intimate photograph or film" and "Sending etc photograph or film of genitals". Police forces began to record these offences from 31 January 2024 under "88C Other Miscellaneous Sexual Offences" and "88E Exposure and Voyeurism".

CPS pre-charge data covers those cases, by suspect, referred to the CPS by the police for a charging decision. The CMS data report the average number of calendar days since the first decision was sought by the police, to the date in which the last decision made was to charge. The data include those cases where the police were required to submit further evidence prior to a decision to charge being made. The data also include more serious complex cases including those involving a death, rape and serious sexual offences, child abuse, large-scale or long-term fraud, and cases with substantial or complex video or audio key evidence. CPS prosecutors must authorise charges in cases of domestic abuse except in forces involved in the DA Charging Authority Project where police decision makers can authorise charging decisions in some "summary only" or "either way" offences in accordance with specific guidance.

It is not possible within the system to separately record the timeliness of cases subject to advice and further work before a charge decision was made and recorded as the last decision.

The data include all cases where the decision was made on the same day by CPS Direct, and cases that must be referred to CPS area-based prosecutors by way of face-to-face, telephone, or written advice and consultation with the police.

There can be a delay between the commencement of new offences and cases coming through to court. This is primarily as a result of the time it takes for an offence to be investigated, the police to assign an outcome, the prosecution, and to result in a completed court case.

Deciding that a prosecution should take place

TheCode for Crown Prosecutorssets out the conditions that must be met for a prosecution to take place [note 2]. There are two stages to this: the evidential stage and the public interest stage.

The evidential stage requires that the CPS must be satisfied that there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction against each defendant on each charge. This finding is based on the Prosecutor's objective assessment of the evidence. It must also be in the public interest to prosecute the offence and the offender. It means that an objective, impartial and reasonable jury, bench of magistrates or judge hearing a case alone, properly directed and acting in accordance with the law, is more likely than not to convict the defendant of the charge alleged. This is a different test from that applied by the criminal courts where a court may only convict if it is sure that the defendant is guilty.

In circumstances where a victim is not willing or is unable to support a prosecution, when considering public interest, prosecutors will give careful consideration to a number of factors. These can include the seriousness of the offence, the interests and safety of the victim, other family members and any children or other dependants, the culpability and maturity of the defendant, and any other factors that may present as relevant to public interest.

In every case where there is sufficient evidence to justify a prosecution, prosecutors must go on to consider whether a prosecution is required in the public interest. A prosecution will usually take place unless the Prosecutor is satisfied that there are public interest factors tending against prosecution, which outweigh those tending in favour. In the case of domestic abuse, it will be rare for the public interest stage not to be met.

Ministry of Justice – controlling or coercive behaviour prosecutions and convictions

Criminal justice outcomes data on controlling or coercive behaviour offences are available from the Ministry of Justice (MoJ).

Criminal court data are primarily published on a principal offence basis, meaning that where proceedings involve more than one offence, the principal (typically most serious) offence is reported. The MoJ publishes quarterly criminal justice statistics that show the combination of offences for which defendants were prosecuted.

MoJ data refer to a different time period to prosecutions data published by the CPS, and relate to the final offence at each court – so an offence initially prosecuted as controlling or coercive behaviour, but convicted of a lesser offence will be recorded in MoJ convictions data with the lesser offence [note 3]. As a result, data from the CPS and MoJ are not directly comparable.

As with CPS data, there can be a delay between the commencement of new offences and cases coming through to court, primarily as a result of the time it takes for an offence to be investigated, the police to assign an outcome, the prosecution, and to result in a completed court case.

Notes for: Pursuing a prosecution and the Crown Prosecution Service

1. Note the percentage of cases charged covers those domestic abuse cases, by suspect, forwarded to CPS during a given year for charging decisions and are not directly comparable in numbers with those prosecuted, which covers cases, by defendant, finalised during the same year. One defendant may have committed a number of offences, usually, although not exclusively, against one victim.

2. Additional information and support for prosecutors to enable them to make decisions in cases involving domestic abuse can be found in Domestic Abuse Guidelines for Prosecutors.

3. A defendant who appears before both magistrates' court and Crown Court may not do so within the same year, meaning for a given year convictions may exceed prosecutions or sentences may not equal convictions. Defendants who appear before both courts may be convicted at the Crown Court for a different offence to that for which they were originally proceeded against at magistrates' court.

7 . Outcomes

Outcomes of charging decisions: prosecutions and convictions

Once a prosecution has taken place, there are two main outcomes: the defendant is not convicted, or the defendant is convicted.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) reviews every case they receive from the police. Review is a continuous process and prosecutors must take account of any change in circumstances that occurs as the case develops, including what becomes known of the defence case.

Where circumstances have changed, sometimes there is no longer a realistic prospect of conviction, or it may no longer be in the public interest to prosecute. In those circumstances a case may be discontinued, that is, stopped from proceeding further.

If the defendant pleads guilty or is found guilty by a jury, they will be sentenced by the judge or by the magistrates.

Regardless of whether the defendant is convicted or not, the court can make a restraining order in appropriate cases.

Data on prosecutions, convictions, and other outcomes of charging decisions for domestic abuse-flagged cases are provided by the CPS (see Section 6: Pursuing a prosecution and the Crown Prosecution Service). These data include reasons for non-convictions. Prosecutions data cover domestic abuse-related cases, by defendant, finalised during a specified year [note 1].

Data showing the sex of defendants are held in the CPS Management Information System, however, the records are not always complete. The sex of the defendant is unknown in some cases and may not be recorded in others.

Domestic violence remedy orders

The Ministry of Justice are responsible for publishing data from the family courts (with data collected by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service through the FamilyMan database) which include orders to prevent domestic violence.

Two types of domestic violence remedy order can be granted by the family courts:

- a non-molestation order, which can either prohibit particular behaviour or general molestation by someone who has previously been violent towards the applicant and/or any relevant children
- an occupation order, which can define or regulate rights of occupation of the home by the parties involved

Breaches of non-molestation orders made by the family courts are classified as a criminal offence. It is not possible to compare across applications and orders, because they do not refer to the same cohort of cases.

Domestic violence disclosure scheme (Clare's Law)

The domestic violence disclosure scheme (DVDS, commonly known as Clare's Law [note 2]) was brought into effect in March 2014. The scheme has two routes:

- "right to ask": this enables someone to ask the police about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts
- "right to know": the police can proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances

Every request under the DVDS is thoroughly checked by a panel made up of police, probation services and other agencies to ensure information is only passed on where it is deemed lawful, proportionate and necessary.

Individual processes in place across forces for considering and approving applications may vary. Trained police officers and advisers are then on hand to support victims through the difficult and sometimes dangerous transitional period.

Domestic violence protection orders (DVPOs) and domestic violence protection notices (DVPNs)

DVPOs and DVPNswere introduced across all 43 police forces in England and Wales on 8 March 2014. A DVPO is a civil order that provides protection to victims by enabling the police and magistrates' courts to put in place protective measures in the immediate aftermath of a domestic violence incident. A DVPO is often used where there is insufficient evidence to charge a perpetrator and provide protection to a victim via bail conditions.

A DVPN is the initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence. This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively prevent the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim. A DVPN may be issued to a person aged 18 years and over if the police superintendent has reasonable grounds for believing that:

- the individual has been violent towards an associated person
- the individual has threatened violence towards an associated person
- the DVPN is necessary to protect that person from violence or a threat of violence by the intended recipient of the DVPN

A DVPO can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. An application for a DVPO by the police to a magistrates' court should be completed within 48 hours of the DVPN being served on the perpetrator.

Data are included in the release on the number of DVPOs and DVPNs which are applied for, and the number which are granted [note 3]. DVPOs are granted by a magistrate, whereas DVPNs can be approved by a police superintendent; this may explain any disparity seen between the approval of DVPNs and DVPOs.

From year ending March 2025, Greater Manchester, Cleveland and North Wales police force areas are trialling Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs). The reported numbers of DVPNs and DVPOs published in our Domestic abuse and the criminal justice system tables may include a very small number of DAPNs and DAPOs, respectively. In addition, a few of the Borough Command Units are trialling DAPNs and DAPOs within the Metropolitan Police. More information can be found in the Domestic Abuse Protection Notices (DAPNs) and Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs) guidance.

Notes for: Outcomes

1. A defendant who appears before both magistrates' court and Crown Court may not do so within the same year, meaning for a given year convictions may exceed prosecutions or sentences may not equal convictions. Defendants who appear before both courts may be convicted at the Crown Court for a different offence to that for which they were originally proceeded against at magistrates' court.

2. This initiative was named after Clare Wood who was murdered by her ex-boyfriend in 2009, who unbeknown to her had a record of violence against women.

3. Not all forces are able to provide data on the number of DVPOs and DVPNs which are applied for, and the number which are granted.

8 . Comparing data sources across the criminal justice system

It is important to note that the data collected and reported throughout the release are not directly comparable between stages. This is because they are collected on different bases (for example, victims, crimes, suspects or defendants) and may not cover the same cohort because of variation in the time taken for cases to progress through the system.

Statistics on domestic abuse are produced separately by a number of different organisations in England and Wales. When taken in isolation, these statistics may not provide the context required by users to enable them to understand the national and local picture of domestic abuse.

Although these datasets are not directly comparable, bringing the data together in ourDomestic abuse and the criminal justice system tablesallows us to provide a picture of the level of attrition through the criminal justice system.

Data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) should not be viewed in isolation. The estimates from the survey show a higher level of domestic abuse, in terms of the number of victims, than other data sources. They also show that many victims will not report the abuse they have experienced to the police. Therefore, while the CSEW provides the best available estimate of trends in the prevalence of domestic abuse, they may not match trends in administrative data sources. The CSEW cannot be used to make any inferences about demands on the police, the criminal justice system's response to perpetrators, or service provision.

Many incidents of domestic abuse do not come to the attention of the police, which is why the estimated number of victims from the survey can be higher than the number of police recorded incidents and crimes. Of those incidents that are recorded, some will fall short of notifiable offences and are therefore not recorded as crimes.

Changes seen in police recorded crime data can be affected by a range of different practices, including police forces improving their identification and recording of domestic abuse incidents as crimes, and an increased willingness by victims to come forward and report these crimes. As such, data held by the police can only provide a partial picture of the actual level of domestic abuse experienced.

It is necessary to look at the data presented in this release in its entirety since each individual stage of the system is, in part, influenced by activity at a prior stage. In particular, improving the police's ability to investigate, solve, and support the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in prosecuting domestic abuse cases is dependent upon understanding and improving many elements of domestic abuse investigations.

Furthermore, cases may drop out at any stage of the process. The different datasets included in this release do not relate to the same cases given the different timescales and reference periods used to collect the data. Data can be based on offences, victims, suspects or defendants and can also vary in the way that cases are identified.

These factors, together with the time lag between the stages in the criminal justice process, mean that data discussed at each stage of the criminal justice process do not refer to the same cohort of cases and so direct comparisons cannot be made across sources [note 1]. Throughout the release, caveats are provided to make it clear where a comparison can be made and where it may be more difficult or not possible to directly compare data sources.

Notes for: Comparing data sources across the criminal justice system

1. For example, a case reported to the police in one year may not appear with an outcome until after investigation the next year, or a case with a prosecution outcome in one year may have been initially reported to the police in a previous year.

9 . Glossary

Arrest

The taking or keeping of a person in custody by legal authority, especially in response to a criminal charge.

Bail

Pre-charge bail is the temporary release of a person while further investigations are conducted or more evidence is sought. Post-charge bail is the temporary release of an accused person while awaiting trial.

Charged

Cases where the Crown Prosecution Service's decision was to charge.

Combined incident and crime data

Domestic abuse police incidents and domestic abuse-related crimes combined, providing the total demand on police. This is used to calculate a combined incident and crime rate for domestic abuse and the proportion of domestic abuse incidents that were recorded as crimes.

Controlling or coercive behaviour

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape, and regulating their everyday behaviour. Coercive behaviour is a continuing act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim.

Convictions

Cases where the defendant was convicted following a prosecution, comprising:

- conviction after trial: cases in which the defendant pleaded not guilty, but was convicted after the evidence is heard
- guilty plea: where the defendant pleaded guilty
- proof in absence: cases comprising of lesser offences which were heard by the court in the absence of the defendant

Domestic abuse-related crimes

Incidents of domestic abuse that resulted in a crime being recorded by the police and are included in police recorded crime. These can also be referred to as domestic abuse-related offences. Domestic abuse-related crimes can be added to domestic abuse incidents to create a total picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.

Domestic abuse police incidents

Incidents of domestic abuse that were reported to the police, but following investigation, do not amount to a crime or offence according to the National Crime Recording Standards. These can be added to domestic abuse-related crimes to create a total picture of the demand that domestic abuse puts on the police.

Domestic homicides

Any homicide where the relationship between the victim (aged 16 years or over) and the perpetrator falls into one of the following categories:

- spouse
- cohabiting partner
- boyfriend or girlfriend
- ex-spouse, ex-cohabiting partner or ex-boyfriend or girlfriend
- adulterous relationship
- lover's spouse
- son or daughter or parent (including step and adopted relationships)
- brother or sister
- other relatives

Domestic violence disclosure scheme or Clare's Law (DVDS)

These schemes give members of the public a formal mechanism to make enquiries about an individual who they are in a relationship with, or who is in a relationship with someone they know, where there is a concern that the individual may be violent towards their partner. The scheme has two routes:

- "right to ask": this enables someone to ask the police about a partner's previous history of domestic violence or violent acts; a precedent for such a scheme exists with the Child Sex Offender Disclosure Scheme
- "right to know": the police can proactively disclose information in prescribed circumstances

Domestic violence protection notice (DVPN)

The initial notice issued by the police to provide emergency protection to an individual believed to be the victim of domestic violence. This notice, which must be authorised by a police superintendent, contains prohibitions that effectively prevent the suspected perpetrator from returning to the victim's home or otherwise contacting the victim.

Domestic violence protection order (DVPO)

This response can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days.

Independent domestic violence advisors (IDVAs)

An IDVA is a professionally qualified, specialist domestic abuse worker, who supports high-risk victims of domestic abuse. High-risk cases are determined using the Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour-Based Violence (DASH) Risk Identification Checklist, professional judgement and where repeat incidents are occurring.

Multi-agency risk assessment conferences (MARACs)

A MARAC is a meeting where information is shared on the highest-risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, health, child protection, housing practitioners, independent domestic violence advisors, probation and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.

No prosecution

Cases where the Crown Prosecution Service's decision was not to prosecute, for evidential or public interest reasons.

Non-convictions

The outcomes of all completed prosecutions where the defendant was not convicted, comprising the following:

- discontinued and withdrawn: cases where consideration of the evidence and of the public interest led the Crown Prosecution Service to discontinue proceedings at any time before the start of the trial – included here are cases formally discontinued in advance of the hearing, those in which no evidence was offered and those withdrawn at court; also included are cases in which the defendant was bound over to keep the peace
- acquitted or dismissed after full trial: cases in which the defendant pleaded not guilty and proceedings were either dismissed by the magistrates or acquitted by a jury at the Crown Court after hearing the defence case
- administratively finalised: see definition for post-charge administrative finalisation
- discharged committals: committal proceedings in which the defendant is discharged; following a discharge a case can be reinstated

Non-molestation order

This is a type of civil injunction used in domestic violence cases. It prevents the applicant or any relevant children from being molested by someone who has previously been violent towards them. Since July 2007, failing to obey the restrictions of these orders has been a criminal offence for which someone could be arrested.

Order

The document bearing the seal of the court recording its decision in a case.

Occupation order

This is a type of civil injunction used in domestic violence cases. It restricts the right of a violent partner to enter or live in a shared home.

Other pre-charge decision

Cases where the outcome of the charging decision has not been recorded or is undefined.

Out of court disposal

Cases where a caution, conditional caution, reprimand or final warning has been given or where the offence has been taken into consideration in relation to other charges.

Police outcomes

These data are based on the full outcomes framework[note 1] introduced in April 2014. The outcomes framework allows every crime recorded by the police to be given a detailed outcome, showing how the police deal with crimes (including crimes that are still under investigation).

Post-charge administrative finalisation

Cases where the defendant has been charged may be administratively finalised at the prosecution stage. Post-charge administrative finalisation may occur when prosecution cannot proceed because a defendant has failed to appear at court and a Bench Warrant has been issued for his or her arrest, or the defendant has died, or is found unfit to plead, or where proceedings are adjourned indefinitely. If the police trace a missing defendant, then proceedings can continue.

Pre-charge administrative finalisation

For some cases referred to the CPS for a pre-charge decision, no legal decision is made and instead the case is administratively finalised. Reasons for pre-charge administrative finalisation include:

- the CPS have asked the police to provide further information where there is insufficient evidence to make a charging decision
- the CPS have advised the police to charge but the suspect has not been charged because the suspect has not answered police bail or cannot be located
- where the case has been returned to the police, with or without a lawyer's advice and/or actions, and the police decide to take no further action on the allegation

Administratively finalised decisions are not legal decisions and may not be the end of the case.

Pre-charge decisions

Of all the suspects referred by the police, pre-charge decisions are those where the CPS has completed making a decision on whether to charge, take no further action, recommend an out of court resolution, record an outcome of pending response – further investigation or "other".

Pre-charge receipts

The number of suspects referred by the police to the CPS for a charging decision.

Prevalence rate

The percentage of people aged 16 years and over who reported they had experienced any form of domestic abuse in the last year in the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). This prevalence rate is used to produce estimates of the number of victims of domestic abuse, as reported in the CSEW.

Prosecutions

All cases where the defendant(s) were charged, summonsed in court, or charged by way of a postal requisition during the period. This includes those proceeding to a trial or guilty plea, those discontinued and those which could not proceed.

Reasons for non-conviction

Reasons for non-conviction comprise the following:

- acquittals after trial: the defendant is found not guilty by the magistrates or jury after a contested hearing in which the defence is called on to present its case
- victim issues: this could be where a victim supports the prosecution case but fails to attend, refuses to be called, refuses to give evidence as a witness or withdraws a complaint; this could also be where the evidence of the victim fails to support the prosecution of the defendant, including issues of credibility leading to a non-conviction outcome, but the victim has not retracted
- administrative finalisations: see definition for post-charge administrative finalisation
- all other reasons: includes conflict of evidence or an essential legal element missing

Notes for: Glossary

1. See section 1 ofCrime outcomes in England and Wales 2025 to 2026 on GOV.UK for more information.

10 . More about domestic abuse

Other commentary discussing domestic abuse in England and Wales, and quality and methodology information, can be found in theDomestic abuse in England and Wales overview.

11 . Related links

Domestic abuse in England and Wales overview: November 2026
Bulletin | Released 25 November 2026
Figures on domestic abuse from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, police recorded crime and a number of different organisations.

Domestic abuse prevalence and trends, England and Wales: year ending March 2026
Article | Released 25 November 2026
Prevalence, long-term trends and types of domestic abuse experienced by adults, based on findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and police recorded crime.

12 . Cite this article

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